

sAkshI and Brahman

It is important to understand the entities sAKshI and Brahman.

By the word 'Brahman', Shruti means 'nirguNa Brahman' which is 'shuddha chaitanya'. It is described through neti, neti. It cannot be described positively and is indicated through negation of avidyA and its effects.

By the word 'sAkshI', Shruti means avidyA-upahita-Brahman. That is to say, Brahman with the upAdhi of avidyA is called sAkshI. VArtika says in 1.4.372 - अज्ञानमात्रोपाधित्वादविद्यामुषितात्मभिः।

कौटस्थान्निर्द्वयोऽप्यात्मा साक्षीत्यध्यस्यते जडैः॥

An analogy:

Sun is prakAsha-swarUpa. It is prakAsha-mAtra. There is no action of illumination in it. A planet is born and it dies. When it is present, it is illuminated by the sun. When it is not present, it is not there to be illuminated by the sun. There is no change in the sun prior and post illumination of the planet. It remains as it was before. There is no kriyA or change or action in prakAsha-mAtra sun.

However, from the frame of reference of the planet, the sun is not only prakAsha-mAtra. It is also prakAshaka. It illuminates that planet. From the frame of reference of the planet, the sun no longer remains mere sun. It becomes planet-upahita-sun.

Similarly, shuddha chaitanya is jnAna-mAtra. There is no jnAna-kriyA in it. However, from the frame of reference of avidyA, it becomes avidyA-upahita-chaitanya just as sun becomes planet-upahita-sun. avidyA is therefore not illuminated by shuddha chaitanya but by avidyA-upahita-chaitanya.

From the frame of reference of Brahman, there is no avidyA. It is only from the frame of reference of avidyA that the presence of avidyA is accepted. And from the frame of reference of avidyA, Brahman does not remain Brahman, but becomes avidyA-upahita-Brahman.

This avidyA-upahita-Brahman is called sAkshI. And that is why avidyA is NOT shuddha-chit-prakAshyA rather sAkshi-bhAsya.

Features of sAkshI

We have seen that sAkshI is nothing but shuddha chaitanya, but is termed as sAkshI only from the frame of reference of avidyA. Thus, sAkshI is not shuddha chaitanya but avidyA-upahita-chaitanya. Thus, sAkshI will be dependent on avidyA for its very meaning.

1. sAkshI is nitya. Not on account of being shuddha chaitanya but on account of being upahita by avidyA. As long as avidyA remains, sAkshI remains illuminating avidyA. The sAkshI vanishes, or the sAkshi-tva of sAkshI vanishes, when avidyA is removed. Since sAkshI is not eternal like shuddha chaitanya on account of being upahita, its nityatva is only on account of avidyA.
2. sAkshI always illuminates. Its drishTi is never lost. When there is avidyA along with its effects, that is in waking and dream, sAkshI shines. When there is only avidyA without its effects, sAkshI shines. VArtika says in 4.3.192 – द्रष्टृदर्शनदृश्यांश्च यः स्वप्ने प्रसमीक्षते। तदभावं सुषुप्तं चे स आत्मैत्यभ्युपेयताम्॥ In 4.3.1474 – पश्यामीति यथाऽद्राक्षीरात्मदृष्ट्यैव जागरो। न पश्यामीत्यपि तथा नित्यदृष्ट्यैव वीक्षसे॥
3. sAkshI knows through avidyA-vritti. Since there is no change possible in shuddha chaitanya, the knowledge of sAkshI can take place only through a modification in avidyA.

This avidyA is always illumined by chaitanya through a reflection thereof -

आत्माज्ञानमतः प्रत्यक्चैतन्याभासवत्सदा। आत्मनः कारणत्वादेः प्रयोजकमिहेष्यते॥(BBV 4.3.355)

तदात्मज्योतिषेद्धं सन्नित्यमेवावतिष्ठते। उत्पत्तिस्थितिभङ्गानां न वेद्मीति च साक्षितः॥ (BBV 4.3.351)

However, sAkshI knowing avidyA, unknown objects, jnAtaika-sat objects is only possible through avidyA-vritti.

4. There is tAdAtmya-adhyAsa of avidyA-vritti-pratibimbata-chaitanya and avidyA-upahita-chaitanya. Hence, at times, avidyA-vritti-pratibimbata-chaitanya is also termed as sAkshI. The clear mode of knowledge of sAkshI is therefore vishayAkArA-avidyA-vritti-pratibimbata-chaitanya. avidyA is therefore known by avidyAkArA-avidyA-vritti-pratibimbata-chaitanya which is superimposed in avidyA-upahita-chaitanya.

Conclusion

sAkshI is shuddha chaitanya from the frame of reference of avidyA. That is to say, it is avidyA-upahita-chaitanya. From the frame of reference of Brahman, there is no avidyA. Hence, there is no question of Brahman being sAkshI. Brahman is sAkshI only from the frame of reference of avidyA. Thus, sAkshi-hood is superimposed on Brahman and it stands negated when avidyA is removed. sAkshI always illuminates avidyA. It is said to witness the witnessed through avidyA-vritti.